



02/24/2023

House on Human Services Committee

Chair, Rep. Theresa Wood & Vice Chair, Rep. Jessica Brumstead

Dear Chair Wood & Vice Chair Brumstead,

We are writing to you to urge you to increase funding for the Post Permanency Support Program (PPSP) within the Department for Children and Families budget in fiscal year 2024.

Easterseals VT is committed to supporting families formed by adoption and guardianship. We are one of three agencies to partner with Vermont's Department for Children and Families-Family Services Division (DCF-FSD) in coordinating services that ultimately help prevent adoption dissolution and kinship placement disruption. PPSP services have been level funded since 2012; and current PPSP contracts are being reimbursed at an alarmingly low rate of \$293.97 PMPM. This funding is inadequate. It does not represent the true cost of service delivery and results in fewer families being served. We are advocating for the true break even cost of service: **\$585.56 PMPM**. Services would still be subsidized at this rate, but to a lesser degree.

PPSP is at the heart of Easterseals VT services, and is the first program we started when we began working directly with families in their homes in 1993. Thus, this program is at the core of our mission: *To provide plans of care comprised of thoughtfully integrated services that help those with varied abilities live, learn, work, and play throughout their lifetimes.* Adoption and Guardianship is the best outcome for many children who have been in foster care, but real work begins after the papers are signed as the newly formed family works to build strong bonds and lessen the impact of prior adverse childhood experiences. Our PPSP team is comprised of adoption competent, trauma informed professionals: they assist families by focusing on their individual needs, which often change over time depending on shifting family dynamics and the developmental needs of growing children. Needs are often related to normative adoption themes, early childhood trauma and abuse, attachment complexities, or challenging kinship relationships. In 2021, PPSP services helped just over 1,000 children and their families statewide. Our ultimate goal with PPSP is to enhance permanency outcomes for children, improve the stability of adoptions and guardianships within Vermont, and increase the resilience of families who are parenting children with complicated histories.

Prior to the inception of PPSP, many adoptions formed through foster care were failing across the state, thus creating more trauma for children and making it harder to attract qualified families. Parents find the following program elements to be most helpful: In-home education; coordinating treatment teams; school consultation; support with kinship placement complexities; referral and resource connections; support group facilitation by our PPSP Specialists; and respite funding. PPSP services provide a lifeline to families formed by adoption and guardianship. The following quotes illustrate the value of PPSP through the appreciation expressed by parents:

*"When our family was struggling with the diverse and often overwhelming needs of several adopted youth, the one constant, positive, pragmatic and unerringly supportive resource was our post-adoption worker from Easterseals. I can't say 'Thank you' enough for their workers who always respond, always show up, and always support us. A shining example of a part of the system that really works!"*

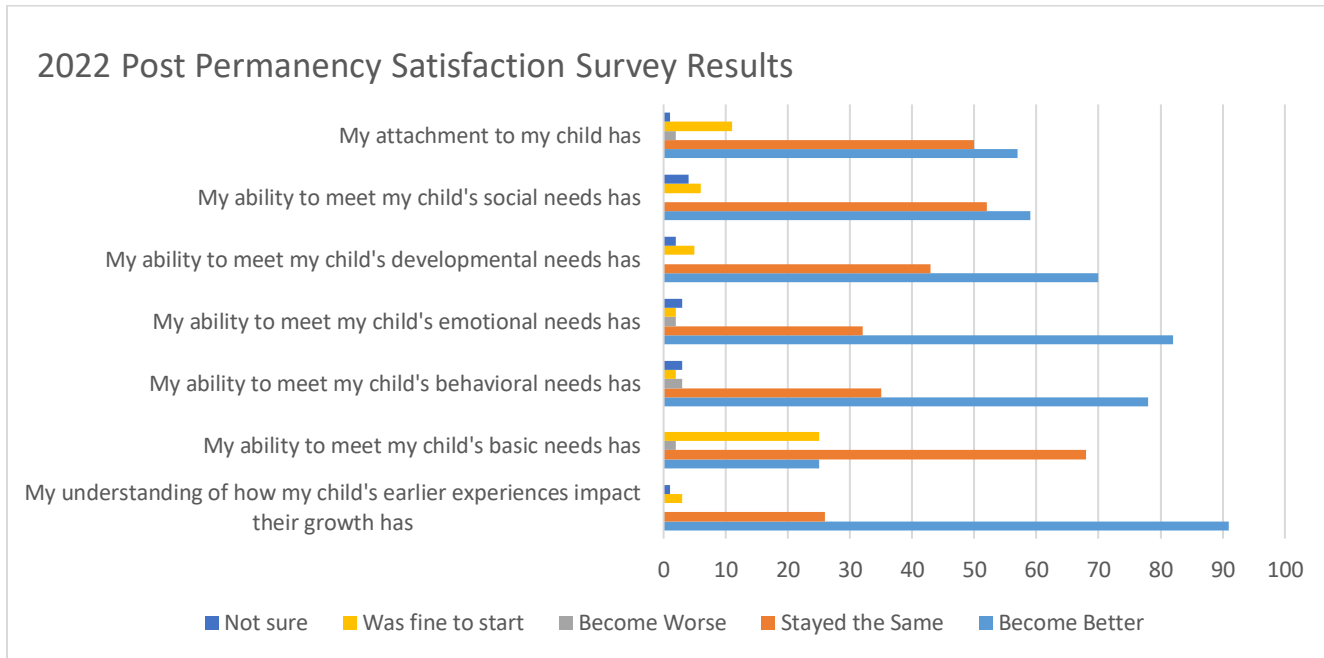
*"After spending time with you, I feel heard, understood, and empowered. You help give me back the focus and goals I need to move forward. I don't feel so alone....."*

*"Having adopted 14 years ago with no post-permanency services, we are very aware of the need for support after adoption. There are so many surprises and challenges. We are very grateful for the services available from Easterseals this time around."*

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The state's investment in services must be revived in order to make PPSP sustainable. Services help prevent health problems, educational challenges, behavioral issues, DCF involvement, and out-of-home placement. Consider the below chart that demonstrates the direct result of robust funding:



The money invested in PPSP services has a direct impact on Vermont families; however, with current funding, the service is not sustainable. We simply are not able to keep pace with cost increases and fear we will not be able to offer qualified staff the salary and benefits that their work deserves. An investment in the health and wellbeing of Vermont families is needed. Please make Post Permanency services a higher priority in our state.

Finally, we understand the timing of this request is at the wire, but if you are interested in learning more about what we do – either before your budget recommendations deadline or afterwards – we would love the opportunity to testify in your committee on the great work Easterseals carries out for so many Vermont families.

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

Kristi Lenart-Rikert

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CC:

Rep. Diane Lanpher

Rep. Rebecca Holcombe